

Jewish Class Conflict?

Milton Himmelfarb

IN NO OTHER American election has "the Jewish vote" ever been so central to the strategy and tactics of the candidates, or so prominent in the news, commentaries, polls, and analysis, as in New York in 1969. It was clear that Mayor Lindsay would get most of the votes at the bottom and the top: at the bottom the poor—Negroes and Puerto Ricans; at the top the prosperous and well-educated. In the middle, it was clear that Lindsay was not going to get the votes of the Catholics, mainly Italian and Irish, of the working and lower-middle classes. The question about the middle was whether he would get enough Jewish votes to put together a plurality. He did. Or rather, his Democratic opponent failed to get enough. It was less that Lindsay won than that Procaccino lost. (Of the white Protestant minority, most voted for Lindsay: not as the liberal candidate—they are not extraordinarily liberal—but as the fellow-Protestant, the *landsman*.)

Jews voted more than other whites for the liberal candidate. So what else is new? Jews always vote for the liberal candidate—notoriously in Presidential elections, as in 1968, but also locally, as recently in Los Angeles. There they voted not merely more than other whites but actually more than the Mexicans for Bradley, the Negro who was defeated. From one point of view, then, little has changed.

From another point of view, much has changed. Liberalism is comparative. ("How's your wife?"—"Compared to what?") That Jews vote liberal means that dollar for dollar and year of school for year of school, they vote more liberal than others. It does not mean that there are no class differences in the voting of Jews. Prosperous Jews gave Kennedy a higher proportion of their votes than prosperous Christians did, Catholic as well as Protestant, but a lower proportion than less prosperous Jews. And so in all four Roosevelt elections. Now, in New York as in Los Angeles, that has been reversed. Now it is the more prosperous Jews who have been voting more liberal. The reversal began in 1966, in the New York voting on a civilian review board for the police. Then as now Jews split fairly evenly between what were conventionally regarded as the liberal and the conservative choices, and the well-off made the

liberal choice more than the less well-off. (And then as now, as a group the Jews were substantially more liberal than other whites.)

One way of interpreting the reversal is to say that liberalism has new tasks. These require a capacity for sympathetic, imaginative, even abstract understanding. Naturally, the educated, who also tend to be the more prosperous, are better fitted for that understanding than the uneducated. When liberalism was fighting for social security, it was fighting for the bread-and-butter interests of working people, so of course working people supported it, or its party and candidates. Now, the argument goes, the victories of the old liberalism have deprived the new liberalism of programs comparably appealing to its old clientele. Now the old supporters of liberalism—the famous New Deal coalition—have or think they have an interest in the status quo. They have become conservative. They oppose the new liberalism with its new responsibilities, imposed upon it by time and change.

This interpretation is flawed. It may be self-serving, and is self-righteous. In 1969, in New York, the most telling bit of rhetoric was the name the Democratic candidate gave to the prosperous who accused him of conservatism: "limousine liberals." Earlier, in 1966, was it chiefly education that prompted Jews to vote for the civilian review board, and lack of education to vote against it? Perhaps it was prosperity and lack of prosperity. The prosperous could afford their vote. The unprosperous (and elderly), living in apartment houses without doormen and riding subways rather than taxis, may have voted as they did not because of ignorance but because of concerns explicable by the reality of their lives—a reality against which prosperity shields the prosperous. Similarly with education. Characteristically, in New York, Jews who send their children to private schools have approved for the public schools central educational parks and decentralization, integration and Black Power—whatever, at any given moment, has been the fashionable liberal thing. In New York, Jews who send their older children to expensive private colleges approve transforming the free municipal colleges.

Less prosperous Jews do not think they are de-

fecting from liberalism. They think they are being made to pay the bill for the limousine liberals' kind of liberalism. And they think that as if that were not enough, salt is rubbed into their wounds. First the upper class makes the others pay for upper-class notions of liberalism, and then the upper-class liberals are contemptuous. They make jokes. At a rally of Lindsay people, a comedian describes Procaccino—and by implication anyone who would want to support Procaccino—as sitting in his undershirt, drinking beer, and watching Lawrence Welk on television. Presumably Lindsay—and by implication the typical Lindsay voter—is the sort of man who, in dinner jacket, is photographed drinking a martini with Lennie at Lincoln Center, during the intermission of Pierre Boulez's premiere as conductor of the New York Philharmonic.

Italians, especially, must wonder where contempt for a class leaves off and prejudice against Italians begins. People who would not dream of telling Negro jokes regale each other with Italian jokes. Was that a joke against undershirts or against Italians in undershirts? In Washington a political comedian amused his public with something he must have picked up from his set in New York: Mario is so sure of winning that he dropped by the mayor's official residence the other day to measure the living room for linoleum. The jokes that do not get into print are gamier still. If I were Italian I might imagine that the humorous liberals are not conspicuously partial to Italians. But I am not Italian, so I can understand the undershirt-beer-television-Welk joke to be as much about class and taste as about *italianità*.

In contempt for non-upper whites, many liberals agree with the young ultra-radicals, or actually have learned from them. It was the campus revolutionaries from the rich suburbs who first exposed that fascist pig, the average union member—a potbellied oaf, undershirted, swilling beer, staring at the boob tube. Whether or not New York's white clods heard Lindsay's comedian's joke, they got the message, and it did not enhance Lindsay's popularity with them. Since many Jews, too, stare at the boob tube, and even drink beer, they hardly needed specifically Jewish reasons to vote against him.

In fact Lindsay, or his twins—his men on the Board of Education, that museum director, that university chancellor—had provided in abundance reasons to conclude that he was anti-Jewish: not, or not necessarily, anti-Semitic, but anti-Jewish. For the Jewish members of the pro-Lindsay liberal elite such accusations, or such thoughts, were narrow, tribal, grotesquely passé, not to be entertained privately, let alone uttered publicly, by an enlightened, modern person.

The liberal Jewish politicians, amateur or professional, had their own motives for supporting Lindsay. Though with the same tastes and beliefs

as the other top people, yet they more urgently and personally needed him to win. Reform Democrats, they could not afford a Procaccino victory. That would lose them more than the mayor's office, it would lose them control of their party. However liberal and Reform, politicians act on the principle laid down long since by a reactionary, Senator Boies Penrose of Pennsylvania: if you have to choose between losing an election and losing control of your party, you lose the election.

THE MOST interesting voters were that small group of Jews who by education, income, and habit could be thought of as belonging to the liberal elite but who nevertheless voted *against* Lindsay, and that larger group of middling Jews who voted *for* him.

Some of the anti-Lindsay liberal Jewish elite were not especially conscious of themselves as Jews. In general, like their pro-Lindsay brothers, they rarely think about Jewish interests as such. Among these not very Jewish Jews would be some school principals, some professors in the municipal colleges, and a few intellectuals continuing an old, running fight with the kind of middlebrow outlook represented by the editorial columns of the *New York Times*. These were a minority of their minority, because to be anti-Lindsay it helped to be a Jewish Jew. At the municipal colleges, for example, on issues affecting the future of the colleges it was noticeably the Jewish-Jewish professors who took a position that could be translated as anti-Lindsay, i.e., "conservative." (There is a complication. Professors of hard subjects tend to be more "conservative" than professors of soft subjects, and the Jewish Jews seem to bunch in the hard subjects.) Of course, that those professors are "conservative" does not imply that they probably voted for Nixon in 1968. It implies that they were worried about the Jewish future, whether in their colleges or in the city, that they saw a threat, and that they thought the threat came from Lindsay—Lindsay the agent or Lindsay the symbol.

Since, as is well-known, parochialism, narrowness, and prejudice are more usual below than above, the conviction that Lindsay and what he symbolized were against the Jews was widespread in the lower-middle and middle-middle class. Lindsay's strategy was to weaken this conviction, to lessen the number of people who held it. In two months he saw the inside of more synagogues than a Jew will see in ten years. He apologized, over and over again: not for having been anti-Jewish—he could not reasonably be expected to concede such a thing explicitly—but for having "made mistakes." If they wished, Jews could interpret that as an apology for acts which had inadvertently injured or offended them. Enough Jews in the middle wished to accept the apology,

and to understand it as a promise to mend his ways, for Lindsay to win.

NOT THAT they liked Mordecai, says the Talmud, but that they disliked Haman: not that Lindsay won those Jews but that Procaccino lost them. If the plurality in the Democratic primary had gone, say, to Wagner—with all his air of fatigue and his redolence of the past—Lindsay would not have had those Jews, or the election. Jews could have voted for Wagner without great enthusiasm but also without feelings of unworthiness, and above all without going against a powerful and still operative Jewish tradition that most are probably not even aware is Jewish. That is the tradition of being attracted by the *edel* (cultivated) Gentile and repelled by the *prost* (common) one.

I can give personal testimony, both to the attraction of the *edel* and to our unawareness that we are attracted because we are Jews. During Kennedy's Presidency I read a newspaper report of something that seemed to me splendidly patrician—the President with elegance and wit welcoming as his guests some artists or scholars, or his wife addressing some gracious words of appreciation, in French, to a visiting ballet company that had danced at the White House. Something like that. I was on the train, and turning to Bill O'Hanrahan, an active Republican despite his name, I told him, more or less: "Bill, forget about politics. Look at this news item. I don't care what your politics are, you've got to admit the Kennedys have class." To which he replied: "Yes, I know that's what you people think." I had thought I knew about the relation between being a Jew and having the tastes and outlooks Jews are apt to have. (I had written about it.) In saying what I said to O'Hanrahan, I had tried to discount that Jewish particularism which likes to regard itself as universalism. He educated me. He was not being anti-Jewish or offensive. He was only saying that my admiration for the Kennedy style was less universal than even I had thought—more Jewish—and less detached from politics. Would I have responded as warmly as he to a newspaper account of Ike enjoying a golf reunion with an old comrade in arms?

Lindsay is *edel*—or at any rate urbane. Procaccino is, or increasingly seemed, *prost*. It was so hard for many Jews to vote for Procaccino that Lindsay won. When they entered the booths, numbers of that great majority of Jews who earlier had told the pollsters they detested Lindsay found they could not pull the lever for anyone else. Because Procaccino repelled them, they were prepared to believe Lindsay's apologies and promises. The Jews who stayed with Procaccino were those who found it harder to believe in the new Lindsay.

For the Jewish-Jewish middle-class Lindsay voters, Lindsay had worked hard to appease their

resentment. He had eaten crow. Like the Emperor Henry IV, he had gone to Canossa—a friend of mine has said that Lindsay went to Canarsie. These Jews concluded that he had apologized enough, that he could be trusted not to backslide, and that his experience would warn him and his successors against making the same mistakes. Other things being equal, they thought, it would be better to vote for someone else, in the Jewish interest; only, as things stood, it was in the Jewish interest to keep New York from the greater chaos into which it would fall with Procaccino. (But if only they had a Wagner to vote for!)

The Procaccino voters asked themselves the same questions but gave different answers—or alternatively, agreed about the factors in the equation but weighted them a little differently. Lindsay would not be that much better, they thought, nor Procaccino that much worse: whoever won would be mayor of an impossible city. And they thought it beside the point to speculate whether Lindsay was or was not a reformed character. Grant what was debatable, that he had truly reformed. It was still necessary to vote against him, as Voltaire said of the British government's reason for shooting Admiral Byng, *pour encourager les autres*. It is risky for Jews to show that we readily forgive injuries and slights. No other group consciously subordinates its good to the general good. For Jews to forgive, to prefer the general good to our particular good—that is admirable, but also dangerous, and maybe suicidal. Among all the groups in the body politic, if there is only one which shows it is prepared to renounce its interest, which group will go to the wall in the clash of interests? Will a sensible politician hesitate to make such generous, yielding people bear more than their share of the common burden, pay more than their share of the total cost—especially if he knows that later they will not even punish him for it at the polls? Globally, the misfortune of the Jews is that for fifty years we have had no bargaining power. Our enemies have been so intransigent that our friends have not had to be very friendly to be able to count on our support. In New York now, these anti-Lindsay voters could have said, we do have bargaining power, we are at last free to choose. Let us use our freedom prudently. To vote for Lindsay would be imprudent, so let us vote for Procaccino. (But how much better it would be if there were a Wagner to vote for!)

Only about 10 per cent of the Jews voted for Marchi. That is curious, because if any of the three candidates could legitimately be considered as *edel*, it was Marchi. He was superior to his rivals in learning, intelligence, and wit. His personal manner was pleasant. If he had been only the Republicans' candidate, many more Jews would have voted for him. Because he was also the Conservatives' candidate, they could not bring themselves to vote for him.

BY NOW THE top people's scorn for the slobs is no secret. The warnings have gone out and a certain amount of literature has even begun to be produced, interpreting the beer guzzlers to their 'betters. It reminds me of the understand-your-neighbor, one-world, anti-ethnocentric literature that was common twenty and thirty years ago: do not look down on the Sinhalese cultivator, he has not had your advantages—that sort of thing. One of the best-known pieces of this new kind is Pete Hamill's "Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class," published in *New York* magazine. Really, Hamill writes of the Irish and Italian working and lower-middle classes in New York. He takes them seriously, he respects them. He is frightened of what they may do in their rage, and he makes it clear that he will not vote as they will, but he does not condescend to them or poke fun at them. But then, I think Hamill is not a Jew, and he is not writing about Jews. When a man called Rosenbaum writes in the *Village Voice* about the Jewish lower-middle class, he is amused by those vulgar people, expects us superior readers to be amused, and all in all has a fine time telling us how funny their talk and dress are, and how irritable their narrow minds and pinched souls. The very title of his report—an account of Lindsay campaigning in Brooklyn—is a nudge: "When in Brooklyn, Play Gimpel the Fool." Not one of the people Rosenbaum interviewed, unlike one that Hamill interviewed, was quoted as having said he had bought a gun. If we take Hamill's people seriously, as we should, we should take equally seriously Rosenbaum's people. But Hamill wants us to and Rosenbaum does not.

For the first time since 1932, or maybe 1928, the class differences among American Jews are showing signs of emerging as class conflict. The without-a-second-thought Lindsay voters are one class, the Procaccino and the hold-your-nose Lindsay voters the other class. The first is mainly upper and upper-middle, the second mainly lower-middle and middle-middle. (Mainly, not exclusively.) In the second the proportion of Jewish Jews is higher than in the first. It is members of the first that have dominated the mainstream Jewish institutions and have been prominent in the civic organizations that appeal disproportionately to Jews and rely on their disproportionate moral and financial support, like the civil-liberties unions. Until now the absence of a formal mandate has not kept the mainstream institutions from factually representing most Jews—in things like civil liberties, civil rights, separation of church and state—and therefore from having the implicit confidence of most Jews.

Now growing numbers of non-upper Jews have begun to suspect that when it comes to the things that they are most concerned and anxious about, and that affect them most directly, the upper Jews could not care less, or are actually hostile,

and contemptuous in the bargain. The split between the two classes would have come more fully into the open in the New York election if in the end enough non-uppers had not felt they must vote for the uppers' candidate (for want of a Wagner). If the uppers want to regain the other Jews' confidence, they will have to be more attentive and respectful than they have seemed to be. They will have to show they care.

Finally, it is altogether true that New York is not America and America is not New York. New York has never had a Jewish mayor. Atlanta now has one. It was not the Jewish vote that elected him—there are not enough Jews in Atlanta. We may assume that most Jews voted for him, but what counted was that most Negroes voted for him, together with a minority of white workers. The Negroes voted for the liberal. The minority of white workers who voted for him were apparently showing their annoyance, in the populist tradition, with the father-knows-best mien of the Atlanta economic and political establishment—though, as Southern establishments go, the one in Atlanta is enlightened. Besides the Jewish mayor, a Negro vice mayor was elected.

Atlanta revives the New Deal coalition of minorities and workers, Jews and Negroes. Atlanta—how odd! The only Jew ever lynched in the United States was Leo Frank, victim of an earlier Atlanta populism.

"Reason Thunders in Her Crater"

AN EXERCISE in hymnology may tell us something about ourselves.

"God Save the King." Two hundred years ago, when an English Jew heard "God Save the King" he must have thought it entirely natural for such a song to be sung. A straightforward piece of tribal patriotism, it expresses a simple desire—that *we* shall defeat *them*. There is nothing highfalutin about it, no pretense that we, or "our gracious king," should win because we are better or wiser or more deserving.

Today such sentiments may be less respectable, but they are none the weaker. When the Mets were making their drive for first place in the Eastern Division of the National League, and then for the pennant, and at last for the Series, my family and my neighbors were not indifferent. We hoped, we feared, we desponded, we rejoiced. We did not pretend that the Mets were purer than the other teams, nobler, more liberal, more the instrument of History. It was enough for us that they were *our* team. To judge by the accounts of rioting over soccer games in all three worlds—capitalist, socialist, and Third—the simple, reflexive we-emotion of "God Save the King" is still distributed pretty widely.

Of course, two hundred years ago that English Jew could not really feel himself to be included in the "we" of the anthem. The king was the

chief of a clan, an extended family, but the Jew was not of that family. Neither the others nor he thought he was. To be part of the family you had to be a Christian, or better, a Protestant. A Jew was a guest. There were bad Gentiles and good Gentiles. The English were good. They were better hosts than almost anyone else.

Perhaps, that Jew may have thought, part of their goodness was to be explained by the debt of their culture and religion to his.

- "God save the king," itself, is from Psalm 20:10 (9) (in the Septuagint-Vulgate tradition; the King James Version, following the received Hebrew text, punctuates differently): "LORD, save the king. . . ."

- "O Lord our God, arise,/Scatter his enemies" is from Numbers 10:35, which we sing when we remove the Torah scroll from the Ark: "Rise up, O LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered." (Didn't Montgomery, a bishop's son, use this in one of his orders of the day?)

- The charming "Confound their politics,/Frustrate their knavish tricks" is from Psalm 33:10: "The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought,/He maketh the devices of the people of none effect." (Revised Standard Version: ". . . he frustrates the plans of the peoples.")

- "Thy choicest gifts in store,/On him be pleased to pour" may be a recollection of I Kings 3:12,13 (God's answer to Solomon's prayer): ". . . lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart. . . . And I have also given thee . . . both riches and honour. . . ."

- "Long may he reign" need not be from the Bible, but a Bible-reading people knew they could find "Long live the king" there. And on the principle that divinity doth hedge a king, what the Bible says of God the anthem can say of the king (as with scattering his/Thine enemies). "Long may he reign," therefore, may reflect Psalm 146:10, or Exodus 15:18: "The LORD shall reign for ever (and ever)."

A Jew who prays with any frequency will know nearly all these verses by heart.

The pre-modern quality of "God Save the King" is best seen in "May he defend our laws." To defend the laws was to preserve them unchanged. For pre-modern people, change and novelty are evil.

Is there a useful lesson here for moderns? If, as the Mets have taught us, the we-emotion underlying "God Save the King" has not disappeared, perhaps the emotion for which change and novelty are evil has not disappeared, either. Politicians or concerned citizens who keep urging people to vote for this candidate or support that program because he or it will effect change may be less persuasive than they think, or than they could be.

In the last century a British royal duke, retiring after nearly forty years as commander in chief, addressed his fellow officers somewhat as

follows: My lords and gentlemen, in my lifetime I have seen many changes in the Army. Many changes. But I can say this, that every change has come at the right time. And the right time for a change is when it can't be helped.

The duke was not speaking for the people. His interests and theirs differed, and differ. But his ducal mind may be closer than better-endowed and better-educated minds to the minds of the people.

These days why do politicians and concerned citizens say "change"? Why not say "progress"? No doubt "progress" has for years had an embarrassingly quaint ring about it to intellectual ears, and even the people seem more skeptical about it than before. Yet "progress" still sounds better than "change." I know of a Progress Laundry and even a Progressive Cigar Store and Luncheonette; and Progresso foods and condiments do well in the supermarkets. "Progress" (and its variants), not "Change." Can it be that those who campaign on a platform of change, when they could be foursquare for progress, want to lose? Does winning scare them?

POLITICAL MODERNITY comes in with the American and French Revolutions. Here the ancestral, the hereditary, the ascriptive are put aside. Instead, universal reason and universal ideals are appealed to: in "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" liberty, freedom, freedom's holy light—which, like Emile Durkheim's sacred French Revolution and *amour sacré de la Patrie*, sounds not quite so desacralized as modernity is supposed to be—and in the "Marseillaise," *liberté, liberté chérie*.

For modern Jews this was promising. (By definition, modern Jews were those who had become tired of being outsiders, though comfortable or tolerated.) In the name of universal reason and ideals, all would be active and equal citizens alike, Jews would come in from the cold. Actually, to be universally rational and idealistic you really ought to abolish the distinctions between Christian and Jew. Has the French Revolution adopted a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen? Then maybe there should no longer be Christian and Jew at all, only men who are citizens.

But the very anthems of the American and French Revolutions, "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and the "Marseillaise," already hint at what history is yet to unveil: universal reason and universal ideals are all very well, but they do not abolish family feeling. The anthems are not squeamish about family words or images—land where my fathers died, our fathers' God (many Jewish prayers are to "our God and God of our fathers"), *Patrie, parricides*. If you speak of fathers, I cannot forget that while officially I may be in, my fathers were out. And what is this about God? God belongs in "God Save the King." What is He

doing in a song for moderns? For moderns, universal reason and ideals should be enough. Look forward not backward. (If only those others, who are or used to be Christians, were as modern and forward-looking as we, who used to be Jews!)

One may say that those Americans fudged their revolution from the beginning: after all, the very oath of office their Constitution prescribes for their President—to “defend the Constitution”—recalls the “defend our laws” of the pre-modern “God Save the King.” It should not be surprising, therefore, that the Americans also had the bad taste or inconsistency to put God into their national anthem. Decidedly, better things are to be expected of the French. Then what is one to make of the “Marseillaise”? In their revolutionary hymn why should the French, of all people, invoke *grand Dieu*?

With fathers and *Dieu* the bourgeois American and French Revolutions took back what they gave with freedom and *liberté*. The revolution that would let the out be truly in was still to be consummated. With that revolution, everyone would forget about ancestors. The past would disappear.

That is the promise or the vision of the hymn that celebrates the revolution which will complete all that is incomplete. In the “Internationale” one sings, “*Du passé faisons table rase*,” let us erase the past, let us make an end of the past. Thus is Reason obeyed, thus will Reason exercise her full and rightful dominion.

There is nothing cool about Reason. The “Internationale” invokes *la raison* rather more passionately than “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” invokes “our fathers’ God” or the “Marseillaise” *grand Dieu*. The singers of the “Internationale” worship (or worshiped) *la raison* more passionately than the singers of the other anthems worship their conventional, fathers’ God. The “Internationale” is the hymn of political Jehovah’s

Witnesses, for whom eschatology is the news of the day: “*C’est la lutte finale . . . demain . . .*”—final [!] struggle, tomorrow.

The most vigorous image is of Reason in action: “*La raison tonne en son cratère, c’est l’éruption de la fin*,” Reason is thundering in her crater, the end is bursting forth. Reason reveals herself thunderously, volcanically.

Where else have we been told of a thunderous, volcanic Revelation?

. . . there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mountain . . . , so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. . . . And Mount Sinai was all in smoke, because the LORD had come down upon it in fire; its smoke rose like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. . . . And God spoke all these words, saying: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods besides Me. . . . for I the LORD your God am a jealous [or impassioned] God. . . .”

The biblical echo in “God Save the King” needs no explanation. But the “Internationale” expressly denies God: “*Il n’est pas de . . . Dieu. . .*” No matter. In secular messianism, substantive dominates adjective.

Even for those who wish to abolish memory, the memory of Sinai persists. The repressed returns. A jealous (or impassioned) deity thunders from his volcano. People believe in that deity less because they heed universal reason, as they may have supposed, than because, trembling at the foot of a volcano quaking and flaming and thundering, they have had a particular revelation.

By now, to be sure, for some the belief has become more conventional, less passionate. Reason is *their* fathers’ god.

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